



**Celebrating  
10 years!**

# Thank you!

Thank you for being part of the College Possible family. We are so glad to have you here.

Whether you're just reading about College Possible for the first time, or you've been with us for the last 10 years, we're so proud to share these stories with you.

These pages are filled with words written by our student alumni. Each of them joined our program when they were juniors in high school and our near-peer coaches worked alongside them until they earned their bachelor's degrees.

These stories are meant to give you a look at how varied and vast the student experience is, what kind of barriers they face with higher education, and how earning a degree has impacted the trajectory of their lives. Thank you, Aaliyah, Amanda, Citlaly, and Rae for sharing your stories with us.

It is with help and support from our College Possible family that we can assist so many students in Oregon. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the degree divide to widen even more between the opportunities available to students from higher-income backgrounds compared with their peers from lower-income backgrounds.

We believe that a student's future should be determined solely by their talent, motivation, and effort. Together, we can make college possible for everyone.

Thank you for your continued investment in students,



*Emielle Nischik*

Emielle Nischik  
Executive Director

# 2020–2021 Oregon student results

## COLLEGE ACCESS



**554**  
high school  
students  
served



**78%**  
admitted to  
college<sup>1</sup>



**75%**  
enrolled in  
college<sup>1</sup>



**64%**  
six-year  
graduation  
rate

## COLLEGE SUCCESS



**980**  
college  
students  
served



**145**  
colleges  
attended<sup>1</sup>  
by our students



**88%**  
persisted from  
first- to second-  
year in college<sup>2</sup>



**2x**  
national rate of  
students from  
low-income  
backgrounds

<sup>1</sup> Fiscal year 2021; to any degree-granting institution.

<sup>2</sup> Fiscal year 2021; represents fall-to-fall enrollment to any degree-granting institution.



# Aaliyah

Parkrose High School, '18  
Portland State University, '22

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Being raised by refugee parents and elders, I was taught to keep low, follow others, and do what it takes to stay afloat, even if that meant not speaking up for myself. When my family fled from war and arrived in a foreign land, they had little to no knowledge of the culture and language. My parents and grandparents had only the clothes on their backs and the sponsor that had supported their travels. These experiences impacted the way I was raised during my childhood and teen years.

I was a very shy and introverted student who stayed in my comfort zone. I was too anxious to speak for myself due to the fear of being seen as an inconvenience and not being good enough. Younger Aaliyah would be in awe to see her future self meeting new people, building connections, and representing her community.

I am grateful to say that I found and built a community during my time at Portland State University. I was part of EMPOWER, a multicultural retention program for APID (Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi) students. I danced at culture shows, attended workshops with student organizations, and even facilitated some events. College Possible was there to keep me grounded and remind me of my roots. Connecting with my College Possible coach during each term gave me the space to decompress and explore opportunities that I wouldn't have found myself.

During my sophomore year of college, I was on the search for an internship. I initially did not think it was possible due to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but I was also suffering from impostor syndrome and not believing in my capabilities to gain new skills. As a woman, especially a woman of color, studies show that we do not apply to jobs unless we meet 100% of the qualifications. I am grateful for my College Possible coach, Karen, who motivated and encouraged me

to apply to Multnomah County's College to County internship program (C2C). I did not expect an internship program to change my outlook on how I engage on a professional and interpersonal level—but this one did.

The College to County internship program provides students from underrepresented communities with paid summer internships to gain professional development skills and navigate different career pathways. After two years in the program, plus navigating challenges with making connections in person due to the pandemic, I managed to build my network through online informational interviews with professionals across the county.

After each interview, I felt inspired—the majority of them were with women of color, a few of whom were from my family's home country of Laos. To see these women represent our community in leadership positions was very refreshing and gives me hope for Lao youth who want to attain higher education.

Overall, I learned so much from the College to County internship program. I couldn't have done it without College Possible's encouragement to put myself out there. In westernized countries, systems like education and the government were not created for people who look like me. College Possible's consistent presence throughout my high school and college career reminded me that my voice matters and that I belong here.



# Amanda

David Douglas High School, '16  
Lawrence University, '20

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It all started with a cheesecake. That was the essay that got me into college. It was a story, not of my successes, but rather my failure in making something and letting my siblings see it. As their oldest sibling, I wanted to let them know that it was OK to fail and to understand that most times, it can be fixed. As the oldest, I was the guinea pig because I was the first to work out a path to apply for and graduate from college.

Before I got into college, my understanding of the academic world was limited. I had a silly notion that people after high school were just dropped off this high school cliff and somehow became adults. At that time, I didn't understand what it meant to "go to college"—what did you need to do? Convinced by an upperclassman to sign up for College Possible, I put in an application and was whisked into a school year of ACT practice testing and another year working on college applications.

During that time, I was incredibly excited to learn this new information about applying to and getting into college. I really have my College Possible coach, Sabrina, to thank for that. The idea of independence and learning had this shiny factor to it—it was like uncharted territory. Understanding each component of the college application helped me teach my siblings how to apply to college. I would excitedly share with them the importance of a statement-of-purpose essay or, even though it was tedious and mind-numbing at times, to take the ACT seriously.

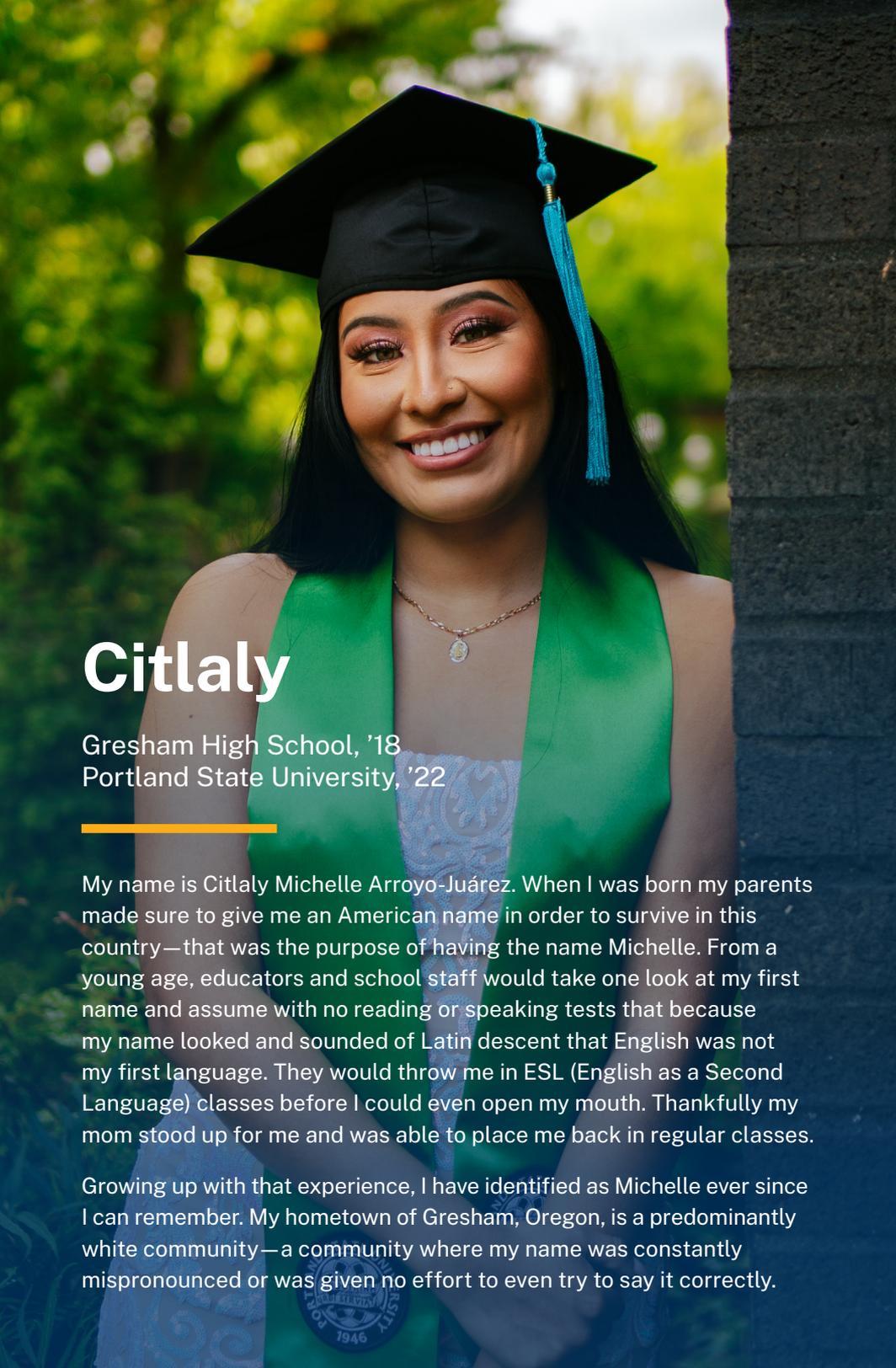
At the same time, I realize now how many barriers there are to college for those who don't understand the jargon or the financial lingo necessary to apply or go to college; most people don't have a College Possible coach or someone to ask. But I was lucky to have support throughout my college years and I was able to graduate during one of

the most trying times: the COVID-19 pandemic.

I started working at a bank six months after graduating, but after about a year, felt disconnected from my community. Having been a mentor who collaborated with my community in the past, I wasn't making those same types of connections at the bank. I decided to become a college and career coach for an alternative high school this past year, confident I could make the same impact for students there that Sabrina had made for me. Coaching reignited my passion to work with my community—I was able to help students through the college and scholarship application process, just as Sabrina had done for me.

My experience as a first-generation student has taught me how important knowledge and wisdom are in overcoming barriers. The impact I made with students led me to pursue further education so that I can continue sharing knowledge with my community. My goal is to become a public librarian so that I may continue to better connect and create spaces for marginalized communities, because the library is a resource for all to use.

It's strange to recall now that my college path started with a cheesecake. But really, it started before that. I was given the knowledge of tools and ingredients in order to make this metaphorical cake, which has led me to my path today.



# Citlaly

Gresham High School, '18  
Portland State University, '22

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My name is Citlaly Michelle Arroyo-Juárez. When I was born my parents made sure to give me an American name in order to survive in this country—that was the purpose of having the name Michelle. From a young age, educators and school staff would take one look at my first name and assume with no reading or speaking tests that because my name looked and sounded of Latin descent that English was not my first language. They would throw me in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes before I could even open my mouth. Thankfully my mom stood up for me and was able to place me back in regular classes.

Growing up with that experience, I have identified as Michelle ever since I can remember. My hometown of Gresham, Oregon, is a predominantly white community—a community where my name was constantly mispronounced or was given no effort to even try to say it correctly.

As a Latina, growing up in that kind of environment felt like I was stripping away a part of my identity for the convenience of the society I was surrounded by.

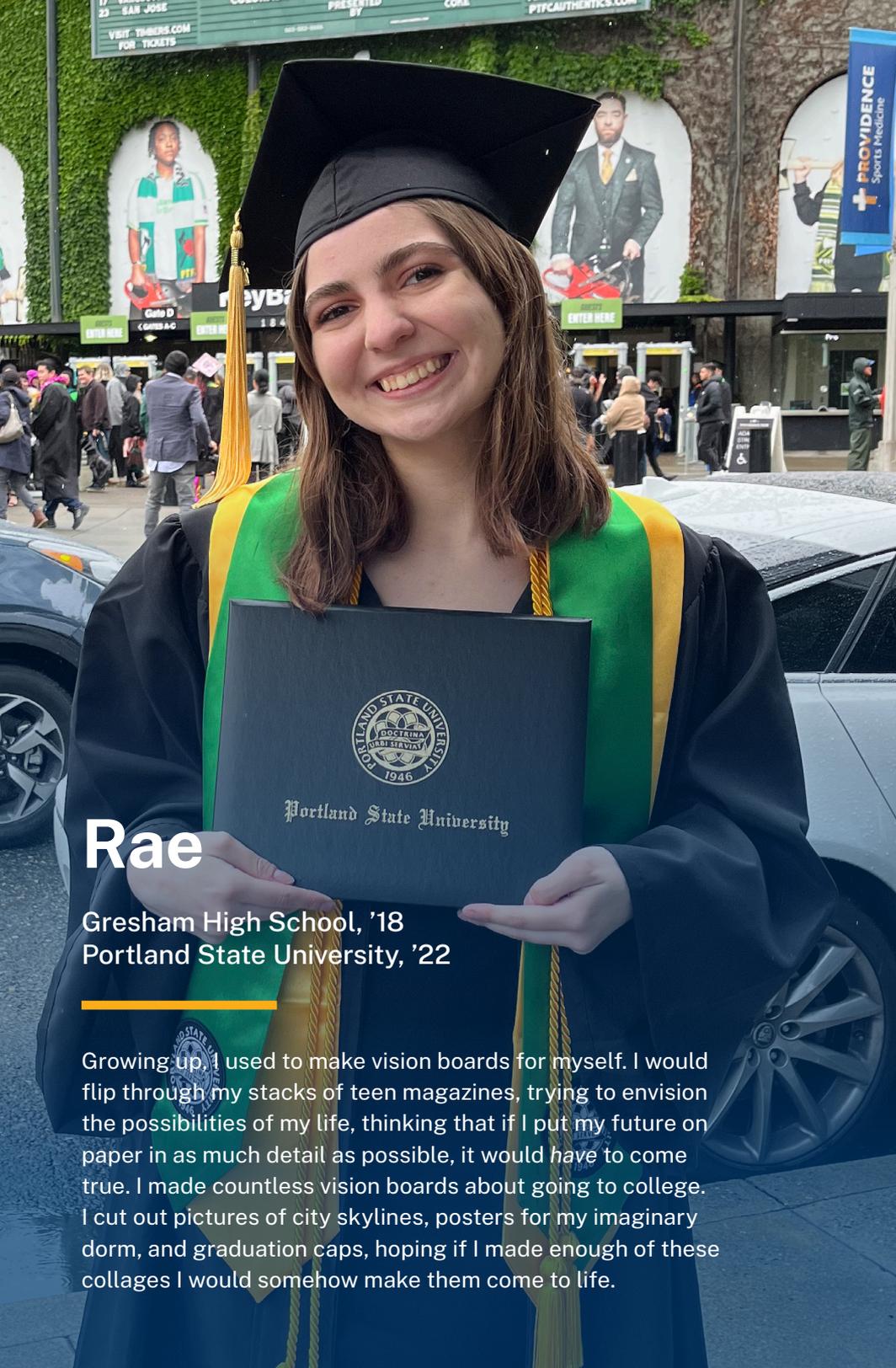
On my first day at Portland State University, I vividly remember arriving at my first college class with Dr. Eddy Francisco Alvarez Jr. He started the class by taking attendance and asking everyone to write their pronouns on the name card he had placed at each of our seats. He began calling out my colleagues' names and then he proceeded to call out the name that I had hidden for so long. For once, there wasn't hesitation. I remember sitting there and for the first time in my life, it felt like my identity was seen and embraced. Since that day I have chosen to reclaim my name, the name that represented my culture, heritage, race, and overall identity.

I took a leap, showed up as who I was at Portland State University, and for once in my educational journey I was being celebrated as a Latina. I became more comfortable in my Brown skin and my identity. With that said, me llamo Citlaly—Citlaly Arroyo-Juárez.

On June 12, 2022, I had the honor of being the first in my family to graduate from college, with a bachelor's degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice and a minor in Chicano Latino Studies. From the bottom of my heart I want to thank The Ford Scholars Program, The Renaissance Foundation, the PSU

Diversity Scholarship Program, and of course College Possible for believing in me and investing in me these last four years. Because of their financial support I was able to graduate with no student loans or debt. I was even able to end my college journey in Europe and experience life in another part of the world. Traveling to London, Paris, and Rome was a life-changing experience for me. I was able to grow as an individual, focus on my mental and emotional health, and push myself to do things outside my comfort zone, including traveling alone. I traveled to Barcelona and Santorini solo and fell in love with my own company—being alone, but not lonely, which is the most beautiful thing I have ever experienced. Words can't express how grateful and thankful I am to have experienced that at only 21.

As a PSU graduate, I am sharing my Portland State story, hoping it inspires others, specifically students of color, that it IS possible. This is a special thank you to God, the universe, my family, friends, mentors, colleagues, and especially everyone who doubted me. I couldn't have done it without you. With that, I am very excited to announce I have accepted a full-time internship with Multnomah County's Department of Community Justice, specifically working with Probation and Parole! I am very excited to see what this new chapter has in store for me. I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. Sí, se pudo!



# Rae

Gresham High School, '18  
Portland State University, '22

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Growing up, I used to make vision boards for myself. I would flip through my stacks of teen magazines, trying to envision the possibilities of my life, thinking that if I put my future on paper in as much detail as possible, it would have to come true. I made countless vision boards about going to college. I cut out pictures of city skylines, posters for my imaginary dorm, and graduation caps, hoping if I made enough of these collages I would somehow make them come to life.

**“When I learned about College Possible, I knew if I had any chance at making those vision boards above my bed come true, this would be it.”**

I was the first person in my family to go to university. I come from a low-income family where no one had found the finances or resources to make it to higher education. When I learned about College Possible, I knew if I had any chance at making those vision boards above my bed come true, this would be it. With my coach’s guidance, I was able to earn multiple scholarships and admission into a Four Years Free program at Portland State University. I was able to afford to live on campus and eventually get my own apartment. I gained so much knowledge and made many remarkable friendships I would not have been able to make anywhere else.

Although all of these accomplishments are immensely rewarding and I am forever grateful to College Possible for giving me the encouragement and direction I needed to get there, none of these are what I am most proud of.

What they don’t tell you about moving to college, and what I wasn’t ready for in all my years of cutting and pasting, was that the most important lessons are learned outside the classroom. I went into college as a sheltered 18-year-old Christian who had never really experienced anything outside of the confines of my suburban, white bubble. Getting to meet and build relationships with people who came

from different walks of life and had different values, perspectives, and experiences than I did really gave me a chance to think critically about the world and myself in a way I never had before.

Seeing life through others’ eyes made my outlook on life, my understanding of morals, my political ideology, and my sense of self completely change. It was like I had been living in a fog my whole life, and through my interpersonal experiences in higher education, that fog was lifted.

College has fundamentally changed who I am. I now am a 22-year-old, openly queer woman. I have allowed myself to explore new ways of expressing myself and new practices. I have never felt more like myself, and I don’t think I would have allowed myself to get to this point without the diverse community I found and created at Portland State University. My college experience not only allowed me to pave a new path for my family and to achieve my greatest potential, but it also allowed me to discover who I truly am through the process, and I could never be more grateful.

# Honoring our founding leaders

Reflecting on the last 10 years, there are many, many people to whom College Possible Oregon owes a great deal of appreciation. Without the early leadership of Ken Thrasher, Suzanne Geary and Julie Mancini, we would not be where we are now.

Ken Thrasher is our founding board chair and continues to serve our organization today. Without Ken's vision and leadership, we wouldn't have been able to get College Possible established in Oregon.

Under Ken's direction, we were able to hire Suzanne Geary as the first executive director in Oregon. Suzanne launched our college access program, attracted new and stable funders, developed relationships with school districts and laid a strong organizational foundation.

Then, under Julie Mancini's tenure, we saw explosive growth in all areas: funding, school partnerships, students served, staff and AmeriCorps. She led the way in moving the organization to focus on college success and ensuring students not only got into college but GRADUATED. We'll always remember Julie for her fierce advocacy for students and her uncanny ability to bring everyone together.

We are so grateful to these leaders who helped shape the organization and set us up for the future. And our future is a bright one. Under our new leadership of Dr. Robin Beavers and Clark Haass, our board of directors is continuing the legacy and thinking strategically about growth, program effectiveness and sustainability.



Ken Thrasher



Suzanne Geary



Julie Mancini

# \$2 million, three years, more dreams realized

**The Getting to Graduation — Leadership Circle** is a group of investors who are committed to education and are willing to make a commitment of \$2,500 or more for three years. Together, we can make college dreams possible for more students from Oregon.

## **Thank you to our current Leadership Circle members:**

Anonymous Donors

Betsy Priddy Fund of Oregon  
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Sona Karentz Andrews and  
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James and Shirley Rippey Family

Jennifer Schuberth and John Urang

Ken and Marta Thrasher

Christine and David Vernier

*List as of 10/1/2022*

If you'd like to learn more about Getting to Graduation,  
contact Emielle Nischik at [ENischik@CollegePossible.org](mailto:ENischik@CollegePossible.org)

# Strong communities start with college equity

When scholars from underresourced communities earn a bachelor's degree, especially those who are the first in their family to attend, they are 24% *more likely* to be employed and 3.5 times *less likely* to live in poverty when compared to peers who don't attend college.<sup>4</sup> Evidence shows that college graduates earn upward of \$1.2 million more in their lifetime, and have higher rates of civic engagement than their high school graduate peers.<sup>6</sup>

Evidence also shows that removing barriers to college access and success can create a more diverse and richer educational experience on college campuses. Removing these barriers also contributes to building a more diverse workforce, a critical factor in fueling greater innovation, stronger communities, and more equitable economic mobility.

## THOSE WITH A COLLEGE DEGREE ARE:



**3.5x** less likely to live in poverty<sup>4</sup>



**24%** more likely to be employed<sup>5</sup>



And earn upward of **\$1.2M more** in their lifetime<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "It's Not Just the Money: The Benefits of College Education to Individuals and to Society," 2015. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/resource/its-not-just-the-money/>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2019/44-6-percent-of-high-school-dropouts-and-72-3-percent-of-college-graduates-employed-in-august-2019.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Lumina Foundation, "Stronger Nation Report," 2015. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/stronger-nation-2015/>

# Help us empower the college dream

At College Possible Oregon, we're working to close the college degree divide. Since 2012, our college access and success programs have helped put more than 2,400 students throughout Oregon on the path to a college degree. The majority of students we serve are first-generation college students while 69% identify as persons of color. Our pioneering model matches eligible students with near-peer coaches and an intensive curriculum designed to help them overcome the most common barriers to getting into college and completing their degree — all at no cost to students or their families.

Through our partnerships with area high schools and college institutions, and the generous support of our donors and funders, we are advancing college equity for the greater Oregon community.

We have a variety of volunteer opportunities throughout the year, like supporting family engagement workshops, one-on-one coaching with high school seniors, and being a leader on our Ambassador Board or Investment Council.

For more information, please email Christina Carl at [CCarl@CollegePossible.org](mailto:CCarl@CollegePossible.org).

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## Invest in future graduates

[CollegePossible.org/GiveOregon](https://CollegePossible.org/GiveOregon)

*Please remember College Possible in your will or estate plan.*

## Join our email list

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## Give this to a friend

Share these stories with someone who might be interested in educational equity and the work of College Possible Oregon.



College Possible is making college admission and success possible for students from low-income backgrounds through an intensive curriculum of coaching and support.

**[CollegePossible.org/Oregon](https://CollegePossible.org/Oregon)**

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